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STUDIES OF FARM KITCHENS

A radio discussion among Mabel Dickson, Office of Experiment Stations; Helen Douglass, Radio Service; and John C. Baker, Radio Service, broadcast in the Department of Agriculture portion of the National Farm and Home Hour Wednesday, February 8, 1939, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 99 associated radio stations.

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BAKER:

Visiting with us today are two young women with but a single thought. That thought is kitchens. These two kitchen-enthusiasts are Mabel Dickson of the Office of Experiment Stations and Helen Douglass of our Radio Service. No wonder you are interested in kitchens, Helen. I hear you are building a new home.

DOUGLASS:

No, John -- not building yet. I have a nice little wooded hillside over the river in Virginia where I'd like to put a little white house. But I can't until I settle one big question.

BAKER:

What's that?

DOUGLASS:

How large to have my kitchen.

BAKER:

Don't tell me that you are keeping the whole house waiting while you decide that.

DOUGLASS:

I consider my kitchen the most important room in the house. And I think most women will agree with me, don't you, Miss Dickson?

DICKSON:

I'm sure most homemakers will. Any room where a woman spends hours every day and does most of her work is very important to her. And farm housewives are likely to spend more of the day in the kitchen than in any other room.

BAKER:

I don't doubt it, but what's your evidence for that statement, Miss Dickson?

DICKSON:

Records kept by hundreds of farm homemakers and collected by workers at various State experiment stations. These records show that women may work from 5 to 8 hours a day in the kitchen and, incidentally, may walk miles during these hours.

DOUGLASS:

You know, John, that the kitchen is the center for the big business of feeding the family. It's the room where a housewife may cook over a

thousand meals a year and wash a thousand batches of dishes.

DICKSON:

And add to that all the other jobs that farm women do in the kitchen -- all the baking of bread and cake and pies; all the canning, preserving, pickling, kraut making, and so on.

BAKER:

But I still don't quite see why the size of a kitchen matters so much.

DICKSON:

All kitchen studies have shown that size has much to do with comfort and efficiency.

BAKER:

But why?

DOUGLASS:

It's this way. If my kitchen is too small, I won't have space enough to work comfortably and efficiently. And I won't have room to store my dishes and kitchen utensils properly. So I won't be able to keep the kitchen in order and work fast.

BAKER:

And that may even affect your good disposition.

DOUGLASS:

Very likely. On the other hand, if my kitchen is too large, I'll waste time and effort walking back and forth. And I'll have to do a lot of unnecessary cleaning.

BAKER:

That's also hard on the disposition. I'm beginning to see now why you're interested in the right size kitchen. It makes for better meals and, I hope, a happier home. Miss Dickson, haven't some of your experiment-station people done research that might help Helen with her kitchen-size problem? Now for example, hasn't somebody discovered a standard size for the ideal kitchen?

DICKSON:

It's about as hard to standardize kitchens as homemakers. The ideal kitchen takes care of the needs of the homemaker who works there. And homemakers' needs differ. However, Maude Wilson of the Oregon Experiment Station tackled the problem recently. She went into many farm homes in Oregon's Willamette Valley and consulted the housewives about the jobs they do in the kitchen, the equipment they use there, and the most convenient arrangements and dimensions for the size of the family.

DOUGLASS:

Let's see. My family numbers four. My meals are very simple. I do very little baking and no canning. And I have only a small stove.

DICKSON:

Then I should say that a small kitchen would suit your needs best. You need a room just large enough to take care of a sink with counter-space on either side and cupboards above and below, a small mixing table and your stove and refrigerator. If you have only one or 2 doors in the kitchen, you should have ample space in a room only 8 by 10 feet.

BAKER:

But now if Helen should move to a farm, she'd need a much larger kitchen, wouldn't she?

DICKSON:

Yes, Miss Wilson found that a convenient farm kitchen had to be a pretty good-sized room, especially if the family eat their everyday meals there and if the kitchen has a double stove.

BAKER:

What do you mean by a double stove?

DICKSON:

Many women use a combination electric-and-wood range.

BAKER:

With a wood range you need space for a wood box, too, don't you?

DICKSON:

In the modern kitchen, it's a cupboard. Near the stove a tall cupboard will take care of the wood as well as the other supplies and equipment that you use there -- frying pans, kettles, and pressure cooker, and so on.

BAKER:

I see. I'm interested in knowing just how small a convenient farm kitchen can be.

DICKSON:

That's what Miss Wilson was interested in -- minimum size for convenience. The smallest kitchen she planned was about 8 and a half by 14 feet.

BAKER:

A kitchen that size doesn't allow for a family meal table, does it?

DICKSON:

No, this kitchen had no meal table and had only an electric stove. The smallest kitchen that included these two features was 11 and a half by 15 and a half feet.

DOUGLASS:

I notice that neither of these kitchens is square in shape.

DICKSON:

No, you can get more convenience in smaller space when the kitchen

is longer than it is wide. You see, in a square kitchen you lose some space in the center of the room. However, Miss Wilson planned a good many square kitchens for houses already built that way.

BAKER:

Miss Dickson, you said something a minute ago about doorways affecting space.

DICKSON:

That's another point Miss Wilson makes. She says that if doors break into the working line, they cut down the comfort and convenience of the room. Too many doors make the kitchen a hall or passageway for the family and separate the working space. If you must have several doors in the room, the best place for them is together at one end. Then the work can go on without interruption in the rest of the kitchen.

DOUGLASS:

Did Miss Wilson work out any minimum size for sink and mixing table?

DICKSON:

She certainly did, and very carefully, too. Her minimum size for the sink with counters on either side is 8 feet 2 inches. That allows for a sink 32 inches long, a left-hand counter of the same length, and a right-hand counter 36 inches, because stacking dishes takes a little more room. Cupboards above and below these counters take care of everyday dishes and all supplies and utensils used at the sink.

DOUGLASS:

Let me get those figures again. The sink and counters together come to 8 feet 2 inches. That's 32 inches for the sink, the same length for the left counter, and 36 inches for the right-hand side.

DICKSON:

That's right. Perhaps you'd also like the dimensions for a mixing table. Because farm housewives do a good deal of baking, the farm kitchen needs an ample mixing center. Miss Wilson suggests a table 25 and a half by 36 inches as the very smallest size for the job.

DOUGLASS:

By the way, wasn't Miss Wilson the person who found out about the right working heights for the average homemaker?

DICKSON:

Yes, that was another study she made several years ago with Evelyn Roberts of the Washington State Experiment Station. Some 500 homemakers in the Northwest tried out various kitchen jobs at different heights. This study showed that women of average height, that is, 5 feet 4 or 5 inches, wash dishes most comfortably if the bottom of the sink is 32-1/2 inches from the floor. The same level is best for beating eggs and mixing generally, and for ironing. But for rolling out pie crust, the comfortable level is a few inches higher.

DOUGLASS:

I'm certainly glad I came over today. Thanks for all those figures, Miss Dickson. I'm going to use many of them in my kitchen.

BAKER:

You ought to be able to start your little white house any day now, Helen. Thank you, Miss Dickson, for bringing us this interesting news of experiment station research. I'm all for more convenient kitchens, but I hadn't realized before that kitchen planning should be such a careful and scientific business.

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